

# MANUFACTURING EXTENSION PARTNERSHIP

## Success Stories from the Field

### **Exiss Aluminum Trailers, Inc.**

#### **Oklahoma Alliance for Manufacturing Excellence**

#### **Exiss Aluminum Trailers Gets Hitched To Lean Manufacturing Techniques**

##### **Client Profile:**

Exiss Aluminum Trailers, located in El Reno, Oklahoma, produces horse, livestock, cargo, auto, vending, and sport utility trailers. The company was founded in 1994 and currently employs approximately 240 people.

##### **Situation:**

Since 1994, Exiss Aluminum Trailers (Exiss) has grown its annual sales from \$4 million to \$70 million by producing its trailers via a batch manufacturing process and competing on price. However, the economic downturn in 2001 and 2002 slowed growth, and the company knew it was time to switch to a pull-type, lean manufacturing assembly process. Exiss asked the Oklahoma Alliance for Manufacturing Excellence (The Alliance), a NIST MEP network affiliate, to help it make a dramatic transition to the lean manufacturing methodology.

##### **Solution:**

The Alliance reviewed Exiss' facility and layout and recommended a new layout to facilitate pull assembly. The plant closed for two weeks in late December 2002 and Exiss, working with The Alliance, tore out every jig and fixture. The employees returned to a brand new layout and a new manufacturing concept. The Alliance provided Lean 101 training workshops to help Exiss' employees understand the new process and the philosophy behind it. Some of these courses were taught in Spanish (a first in Oklahoma) to accommodate the large population of Hispanic workers. Though Exiss' employees initially resisted change, the results and benefits of lean manufacturing soon convinced them that the new assembly process is better. Now they are enthusiastic contributors to the constant improvement of the process.

By switching to pull assembly, the company has made significant reduction in its finished goods inventory and lead times. A plant clean-up effort improved safety and gained work-space, but more importantly it contributed to increased productivity. Exiss has gained market share by having the fastest response time to dealer requests. With increased market share come increased sales, and the plant has been able to avoid layoffs as a result.

##### **Results:**

Reduced finished goods inventory from \$13 million to \$5 million.

Decreased delivery times from 16 weeks to 2 weeks.

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Reclaimed a complete building's worth of space.  
Reduced reportable injuries by 200 percent.  
Improved ergonomics and overall plant safety.  
Reduced defect rates and material costs.  
Improved shipping time from 2 weeks to 2 days.

### **Testimonial:**

"The Oklahoma Alliance for Manufacturing Excellence really made a difference to our company and our employees. This transition has created stability for them. They know that management is finally doing the right things and there's a good confidence level."

Rodney Culp, President